

# *Informal Report to Mayor and Council*



<b>Arlington Neighborhood Initiative</b>		
Council Meeting: 6-9-06	Ref. No.:	Agenda No.:

## **ISSUE**

Provide a detail update, next steps, accomplishments and proposed projects on Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative (ASNI). The Neighborhood Coordinator has been working with City staff and community members to develop detail work plan.

## **DISCUSSION**

The emerging focus on neighborhoods as the strategy for community improvement invites new thinking and poses new challenges. Especially, it demands the engagement of citizens at a level that requires methods different from the past. Successful neighborhood initiatives are shaped locally to respond to the needs of populations and to assure that communities have a genuine sense of ownership. It is necessary, therefore, to solicit stakeholder input, early and often. That means taking time to find out how neighborhood residents really feel about where they live, what their hopes are, what their fears are, and what is working in their neighborhoods and what is not. Most important, new partnerships must be created; partnerships between city department and neighborhood groups, between local reform efforts and outside intermediaries, and between the grassroots stakeholders that bring the local wisdom and the outside investor who have access to power and capital.

Engaging and getting stakeholder input take on a variety of common forms: focus groups, individual interviews, surveys, and open forums. These forums bring together all sectors of a community to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions and build collective approaches to improve the quality of life in the community. In the case of Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative, neighborhood focus groups will be utilized to help further identify common ground, centers of strength and opportunities for action in the community.

Stakeholders include all those who have a vested interest in the stability of their neighborhood and the solutions needed to further its vitality. These are individuals and groups with the potential to affect a specific plan of action. Stakeholder group must be as diverse as possible, represent every major interest and perspective in the community and represent the community's demographic diversity in terms of age, race, gender, perspective and places of residence and employment. Special effort and attention must be given to tapping into populations and people that are traditionally absent from the community process (minorities, seniors, renters, etc.). All the key stakeholders-government, business, community groups and citizens participate in the development of a common agenda. When all of the stakeholders are involved in the creation and ongoing development of Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative and programs, the effort will receive widespread support.

## **Action Plan Key Factors**

Over the past three months, time has been spent researching neighborhood initiative best practices, reviewing and updating materials from previous neighborhood initiative, meeting with key stakeholders, potential partners, assisting residents with formulation of neighborhood associations and developing the goal, objectives and strategies for Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative (ASNI). Key points critical to successful neighborhood initiatives are that:

- Neighborhood associations can be powerful allies for citizen engagement and information dissemination;
- Inter-departmental cooperation can pay big dividends, especially when coordinated with neighborhoods;

- Data and the mapping of data can paint a picture of neighborhood challenges and opportunities unimagined in community-building circles, and
- Resident leadership training encourages positive citizen participation and keeps fresh the people and voices involved in on-going neighborhood revitalization efforts.

As we seek to further define the details of ASNI and develop a plan of action it will be important that focus and attention be given to the following factors:

1. The Scope of Work and the City's Role
2. Targeting Neighborhoods for Initial Action
3. Partnerships and Linkages
4. Building Internal and External Capacity
5. Funding
6. Timelines
7. Communication
8. Monitoring

Among the most important early tasks in developing the initiative is clarity about the scope of work that needs attention and the role the City will play. The reality is that there is not enough fiscal capital or other resources to eradicate every ill or address every worthy cause. Therefore, a goal statement of what the neighborhood initiative will set out to do and what it might be inclined to encourage and/or support others to do is critical. This goal statement will be the language that staff will use when they talk to residents, community-based organizations and the media about the work of the initiative.

Local government is increasingly being called upon to play a more process-oriented role in their neighborhood efforts. One of the challenges for city government in general is the notion of service to all neighborhoods. However, there are certain neighborhood conditions that demand greater attention and resources. Therefore, selecting and targeting certain neighborhoods, and taking a public position about what neighborhoods need particular attention, should be a priority. The selection process requires both internal and external discussions based on the goal of the initiative and available resources.

Key to developing the City of Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative is formulation of strategic alliances and partnerships that capitalizes on the influences of collaborative efforts. Emphasis of the initiative focuses on mobilizing citizens for dialogue, deliberations, and collaborative problem solving. Moving priorities for a neighborhood into practice will require partnerships and linkages with residents, neighborhood/homeowner associations, community-based organization, faith-based institutions, as well as cooperative efforts with a host of other city departments.

At the heart of all strategies to reinvigorate Arlington's neighborhoods are people; the youth and adults who reside in these neighborhoods, city staff, business and nonprofits who have committed to work together. To facilitate moving ideas into practice, building the capacity of both the internal (staff) and external (people in neighborhoods) stakeholders must be incorporated in developing strategic action for the neighborhood initiative. Building neighborhood capacity is a common activity that focuses on engaging and building the skills of neighborhood residents to understand the issues facing their community and to devise and implement an action plan. Critical to the success of ASNI will involve paradigm shifts, training of our employees and restructuring of departments in order to collaborate more effectively with citizens and community organizations.

Successful city-run neighborhood initiatives make a point of gathering financial support and other resources from throughout the community to ensure broad ownership of efforts. Successful efforts require that staff be strategic about staying current with philanthropic interests and city-wide initiatives. Attention and time must be given to applying for federal grants or research grants that could provide rapid infusion of cash into programs and ideas.

It is important that the initiative's action plan have timelines that are patient to the amount of time required to reinvigorating neighborhoods. It will be necessary to show "early wins" in order to gain and keep momentum going internally and externally and give those involved a sense of accomplishment. In reality, everyone wants evidence that their investment of time, effort, money, institutional support or political support is worth it.

A critical component of creating a relevant, widely supported action plan is an active, effective two-way communication plan that hosts dialogue between the city and its stakeholders. It is important that all sectors and segments of the community's population are kept informed through use of annual reports, newsletters, brochures, progress reports, and special events. In addition, use of the internet should be a major tool used to improve information sharing and communication among citizens.

Although the idea of monitoring or evaluation may not relate comfortably to the overall work of the initiative, monitoring the progress of the action plan has merit. Assessment will provide information we need to know whether or not initiative strategies are achieving the initiative goal, and it will provide a report card that can be used by various stakeholders, residents, staff and foundations.

### **Goal, Objectives, Strategies & Timelines**

The **goal** of Arlington's Strong Neighborhood Initiative is to reinvigorate Arlington's neighborhoods and ensure sustainability by leveraging resources, increasing citizen participation and encouraging community stakeholder collaborations. Initiative **objectives** are to:

1. Increase neighborhood capacity
2. Increase citizen participation
3. Strengthen neighborhood networks
4. Develop ASNI

Initiative **strategies** include:

1. Addressing neighborhood deficiencies through cross-functional collaboration between City departments, Arlington Independent School District, the Chambers of Commerce, other community stakeholders and active citizen groups.
2. Building citizen capacity to sustain solutions through training, education and leveraging resources. Reintroduce Neighborhood Academy (**September 2006**) to include three curriculum tracts:
  - Basic Tract – Accessing City Services;
  - Leadership Tract – 7 Habits of Highly Effective Neighborhood Organizations;
  - Youth Tract – Tomorrow's Leadership.
3. Development of a neighborhood resource guide, neighborhood resource center, neighborhood integrity teams and neighborhood response teams.

Council provided direction to staff during the 4/25/06 work session in response to the Single Family Rental Inspection initiative. The City Manager's Office has convened a Neighborhood Integrity Team Citizen Group (NITCG) for the purpose of implementing this Council direction. A total of two meetings have been held.

The first meeting was held on Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup>. At this meeting, staff provided detail background information regarding:

- Redefining duplexes as multi-family and editing section 304, Multi-Family Dwelling Complexes ordinance to reflect the change in definition;
- Developing and adopting a city-wide Neighborhood Integrity Team concept that focuses of increasing code enforcement staff and assigning one code officer for each of the established 27 police beats, and

- Reviewing fee and fine structures that would raise capital to fund additional code enforcement staff.

The second meeting was held on Monday June 5<sup>th</sup>. At this meeting, group members determined that their mission is "Creating a Standard of Excellence for Arlington". Staff clarified and answered questions on inspection and registration fees, reviewed self inspection check list and the group discussed in detail, ways to grow responsible property ownership. Consensus was reached regarding:

- Development and adoption of a city-wide Neighborhood Integrity Team concept that focuses on increasing code enforcement staff and assigning one code officer for each of the established 27 police beats. Staff increase would occur in phases. The first phase would occur in October of 2006, and include hiring seven inspectors plus administrative support. The second phase would occur in March of 2007, and include hiring six inspectors plus administrative support. Approximate total cost associated with staff increase is \$1,588,690.00 (Oct. 1, 2006, = \$812,843; March 1, 2007, = \$775,847). General Fund should be used to fund additional code enforcement staff, and
- Vacant structure and re-inspection fees should be used as a corrective tool for chronic offenders. The fee structure would be ordinance driven and used as a mechanism to complement the general fund.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 12<sup>th</sup>. It is expected that at this meeting recommendations will be finalized and a representative selected to present NITCG recommendations to Council in late June, 2006.

4. Hosting a series of focus group discussions. Over a two month period (**June – July 2006**) a series of small round table discussions will be held with leaders and key stakeholders from churches, schools, businesses, non-profit organizations, neighborhood associations, home owners associations, community crime watch groups, and citizens on patrol groups to establish preliminary scope and direction of ASNI. Afterwards, the City of Arlington will host a city wide Neighborhood Summit (**August 2006**) to introduce neighborhood initiatives concepts to the broader Arlington community, and to get additional input and participation. Additionally, a recommendation regarding the creation of a pilot area to narrow focus, coordinate resources, and design a process for engagement will be introduced.

### Next Steps

Next steps will involve the continued effort of identifying key neighborhood leaders and community stakeholders and invite them to participate in focus group discussions. Final coordination of focus group discussion times and locations will be coordinated both internally and externally during the week of June 12<sup>th</sup>. **Dr. James "Jim" Kunde** and students of the University of Texas at Arlington, Department of Urban Affairs has agreed to collaborate with devising a format for and facilitating discussions. The objective is to incorporate focus group discussions and activities into summer course work load for students with the end result being a detail written document outlining discussion highlights that will assist with establishing preliminary scope and direction for Arlington's Strong ASNI.

Jim's expertise and research experience relates specific to citizen involvement. He has held various types of leadership workshops for council and managers in city government including the City of Arlington. He has experience working with various types of foundations that financially support institutions (public, private, educational and government) that are involved with building citizenry capacity through the efforts of a neighborhood initiatives. Jim's expertise and knowledge of various foundation grantors would be a tremendous asset that could contribute to the fiscal development of ASNI. Internally, he could help with

creation of internal paradigm shifts for management and line staff and assist with understanding how to interact with citizens and incorporate the importance of the neighborhood initiative into each department's business and work plans. Externally, he could assist with understanding how to maximize the participation of stakeholders in focus group and neighborhood summit discussions.

Other important tools and faculty collaborations will include use of survey research, which **Dean Richard Cole** is directly involved with, the "Citizen Academy" knowledge and research experience of **David Tees**, and the minority community civic engagement expertise of **Maria Martinez-Cosio**. Maria's expertise and research experience relates specific to Latino civic participation. She has worked with various organizations to develop participatory programs focused on civic engagement. These programs identify leaders in the Latino community, provide training and encourage them to take an active role in civic participation. Maria could help with research analysis, Spanish translations, grant writing and development of a strategic process for engaging Arlington's Latino and Asian community. Starting Fall-2006, she will be teaching a couple of courses that would include engaging graduate students in neighborhood issues. One course titled Community and Neighborhood Organization will examine the structure and process in the development of community and neighborhood organizations. Special emphasis is given to poverty and minority communities and neighborhoods. Examined is the processes of organizing and empowering communities, and how these are linked to public policy in the United States. A broad range of approaches will be examined, and cases will be drawn from diverse arenas: community organizing and community development, civic environmentalism, health and human services, and civic journalism. The process of civic participation will be placed in the context of debates on social capital, and on the limits of the welfare state and the state's role in rebuilding the urban community's social infrastructure. The focus will be on: building community and civic capacities for problem solving; and developing public policies that reinforce this and expand active and responsible roles of citizens. Students will be expected to engage in active and collaborative learning, particularly in presenting case studies and connecting these to underlying analytic issues and policy options. Development of the ANSI could be used as a case study.

Immediately following focus group discussion, the City of Arlington will host a city wide Neighborhood Summit to introduce neighborhood initiatives scope and direction to the broader Arlington community, and to get additional input and participation. Possible outcomes for the summit will:

- Give stakeholders an opportunity to look at a range of views and approaches, to further develop ANSI;
- Build relationships between stakeholders and organizations who can work together.
- Create more productive ways for citizens to work with city staff, elected officials, and various types of organizations, and
- Help stakeholders gain a sense of ownership of the issues, which increases their determination and ability to find solutions and identify implementation tools for reinvigorating Arlington's neighborhoods.

To celebrate successful efforts of the neighborhood initiatives, time and attention will be given to organizing annual and month long events such as neighborhood clean-ups, neighborhood parades, neighborhood award ceremonies and distribution of neighborhood grants. Currently, there are various opportunities to collaborate with other community wide events hosted by various city departments, non-profit organizations and services agencies.

## **Accomplishments and FY 2007 Projects**

### **ASNI Accomplishments:**

- ✚ Identified and met with key community stakeholders and potential partners;
- ✚ Attended several Town Hall, neighborhood association, and community crime watch group meetings;
- ✚ Facilitated Bay Lakes North Subdivision Neighborhood Meeting;
  - Reintroduced Neighborhood Network;
  - Updated Neighborhood Organization and Action Planning Handbooks, and
- ✚ Established ASNI goal, objectives, and strategies.

### **ASNI FY 2007, Projects**

- Increase Number of Neighborhood Association;
- Reintroduce Neighborhood Academy;
- Develop neighborhood resource guide, ASNI Web Site, neighborhood resource center, neighborhood integrity teams and neighborhood response teams;
- Host a series of focus group discussions;
- Host a city wide Neighborhood Summit, and
- Launch ASNI in pilot area to narrow focus, coordinate resources, and design a process for city-wide engagement.

## **ACTION**

Neighborhood Coordinator Regina J. Blair is coordinating this neighborhood initiative. Interim Deputy City Manager, Theron Bowman and Ms. Blair will continue to identify and work with key stakeholders to further develop ASNI.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Attached:	PowerPoint Presentation
Under separate cover:	None
Available in the City Manager's office:	None

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